DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 573 SP 038 697

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TITLE Intercultural Communication in the Classroom.
INSTITUTION Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, TX.
PUB DATE 1999-07-30
NOTE 64p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Skills; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; *Diversity (Student); Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Motivation; Students; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship; Teachers
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Knowledge

ABSTRACT

This document reviews the existing literature on intercultural communication (ICC) and ties it to teacher-student classroom interactions, exploring ways that teachers can respond to cultural incongruities and reduce the cultural clashes they experience between themselves and students from different cultural backgrounds. Section 1, "Introduction," reviews the issue. Section 2, "Conceptual Foundations of Intercultural Communication," discusses concepts of culture and communication that are necessary to understanding the process of ICC. It explains that communication is an imperfect process, one made even more complex when the element of cultural differences is involved. This section concludes by describing Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) model of intercultural communication. Section 3, "Cultural Influences on the Communication Process: Dimensions of Cultural Variability," explores how culture influences communication, pointing out how cultural variability can impact communication and thereby affect teacher-student interactions. Section 4, "Factors That Influence Effective Cultural Communication," describes how motivation, knowledge, and skills can increase effective intercultural communication. (Contains 65 references.) (SM)

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Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
July 30, 1999

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Intercultural Communication in the Classroom

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I. Introduction

Disturbing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse[1] (CLD) students underachieve in U.S. public schools (Williams, 1995). Despite a history of attempts to rectify this problem (e.g., Chapter 1, Head Start), there remains a persistent achievement gap between CLD students (taken as a group) and their white peers. Although the underachievement of CLD students cannot be attributed to a single cause, one of the continuing concerns among educators is the cultural differences that exist between teachers and their students that contribute to "well-meaning cultural clashes" (Brislin, 1993; Zeichner, 1993). A "well-meaning cultural clash" can be defined as the misunderstanding or disagreement that results when two or more individuals from different backgrounds interact, each basing their behaviors on a different set of rules for what is expected and/or considered appropriate (Brislin, 1993). This cultural clash becomes problematic as the cultural gap between teachers and students widens.

Currently, the percentage of the nation's CLD student population is approximately 30 percent and by the year 2020 is predicted to reach about 40 percent (NCES, 1996; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). This growing percentage of CLD students is most pronounced in urban school districts (NCES, 1996), where "minorities," taken as a whole, have become the majority since 1981 (NCES, 1995). While the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, the vast majority of teachers are monolingual, white, middle-class females (Zeichner, 1993). Currently, white teachers comprise 90 percent of the teacher workforce (McIntyre, 1997) and by the year 2,000, this percentage is projected to be as high as 95 percent (Banks, 1991). In

[1] In using the term "CLD" students, we refer primarily to students whose historical problems with underachievement in U.S. schools have been well documented by current research. This research has predominantly focused on African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Pacific Islander, and Native American students. This does not exclude the fact that CLD students from other ethnic backgrounds and students from backgrounds of poverty may also underachieve when compared to mainstream students. We also want to point out that many culturally and linguistically diverse students succeed in mainstream schools; underachievement is not a factor of culture in and of itself, but a factor of how groups interact in a society.

contrast, recent trends suggest that the already small number of teachers of color are declining (Wald, 1996). In short, the statistics indicate that predominantly white teachers will be teaching a growing number of CLD students whose school achievement has historically been lower than that of their white peers.

This cultural gap is exacerbated by the fact that the teacher workforce, including teachers of color, has typically graduated from teacher education programs that operate from a mainstream/monocultural perspective to teaching and learning (Brown, 1993, Goodlad, 1990). Limited in their intercultural knowledge and experiences, these graduates generally try to avoid working in urban school districts where many of the students are nonwhite and poor. As Ladson-Billings (1990) observes,

> Schools and colleges of teacher education are turning out class after class of young white female teachers who would rather work in white, middle-class suburbs. Unfortunately, their services are most needed in low-income schools, whose students come from races, cultures, and language groups for whom these new teachers feel unprepared. (p. 25)

For teachers to be prepared to teach CLD students, they must understand how differences in the cultural norms of home and school sometimes produce devastating effects for culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth[2] (Greenfield, Raeff, & Quiroz, 1995). Children bring to school modes of interaction and behavior that reflect the "invisible" or hidden culture[3] of the home and that are often in conflict with the invisible culture of the school, thereby creating

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[2] Although the great majority of teachers in the U.S. are women from white, middle class backgrounds, teachers of color also experience cultural clashes, and therefore can benefit from professional development in intercultural communication.

[3] Invisible or hidden characteristics of culture are those norms of thinking and acting that are so ingrained that many individuals are unaware of their cultural grounding (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Visible characteristics of culture might include dress, food, holidays, and traditions.

problems for students and teachers alike (Greenfield et al., 1995). Practitioners are often unable to pinpoint the sources of conflict because these cultural dynamics are not visible. As a result, even the most well-intentioned teachers manage to contribute to cultural tensions.

> Teachers conscientiously attempt to create culturally sensitive environments for their students (e.g., through multicultural displays and activities), while simultaneously structuring classroom interaction patterns that violate cultural norms, i.e., the invisible culture of various minority groups. (Greenfield et al., 1995, p. 5)

For example, teachers may celebrate cultural holidays like Cinco de Mayo while requiring eye contact when reprimanding students whose cultures see this act as a sign of disrespect. Recurrent clashes in teacher–student interactions may eventually leave students feeling incapable of pleasing the teacher.

Central to these classroom-interaction patterns is the process of communication. Effective communication is essential to ensuring appropriate teaching/learning environments in classrooms. It is for this reason that we address CLD student underachievement within the context of intercultural communication (ICC). Intercultural communication, simply put, is communication between people from different cultural backgrounds (Jandt, 1995). Communication between members of the same cultural group is often imperfect and difficult. When members of different cultural groups communicate, they must also contend with numerous cultural differences that complicate the communication process. Social norms for conversation patterns often vary by culture. For example, differences exist in the proximity at which one stands to another person when talking, when interruptions are permitted during conversation, and how adults interact with children (Brislin, 1993; García & Malkin, 1993; Gollick & Chinn,

1998).

"In order to minimize misunderstandings when we communicate with people from other cultures, we need to understand the process of intercultural communication" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 2). Although most of the literature on ICC pertains to the interactions of people from different countries, ICC theory can also be applied to the interactions of people from different cultural groups within a single country. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) recognize that "within any nation, a multitude of racial and ethnic groups exist, and their members interact daily" (p. 4). The urban classroom is one such example.

While there is an extensive body of literature related to cultural discontinuities between teachers and students, our review of published work revealed only a modest literature on the impact of intercultural communication on education (e.g., Au & Jordan, 1981; Au & Kawakami, 1994; Greenfield et al., 1995; Heath, 1981; Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1992; Scheurich, 1997). SEDL proposes that ICC plays an important role in interactions between teachers and students of different cultures, and that increasing teachers' understanding of ICC will contribute to more culturally responsive interactions with students. This document reviews the existing literature on ICC and ties it to teacher-student classroom interactions by providing examples.[4] We draw predominantly from the work of William Gudykunst, professor of speech communication at California State University, Fullerton, and his colleagues (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). This work focuses on developing a theory of interpersonal and intergroup effectiveness that can be applied to improving the quality of communication. We use this model to explore ways that teachers can

[4] The authors come from different cultural backgrounds and have been influenced by mainstream U.S. cultural perspectives to varying degrees. Because it is impossible to divorce ourselves from our cultural backgrounds, we acknowledge that despite our best efforts, our discussion of the issues contained in this paper may reflect our own world view.

better respond to cultural incongruities and reduce the cultural clashes they experience between themselves and students from different cultural backgrounds. We believe that culturally responsive communication with CLD students enhances instruction for this population.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on ICC and to apply its findings to the classroom interactions of teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds.[5] Section II examines concepts of culture and communication that are necessary to understanding the process of intercultural communication. Communication is an imperfect process, one made even more complex when the element of cultural differences is involved. We conclude this section by describing Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) model of intercultural communication.

The third section is devoted to exploring how culture influences communication. In studying dimensions of cultural variability it is important to remember that we have similarities and differences with people from other cultures. We point out how this cultural variability can impact communication and thereby affect teacher-student interactions.

In Section IV, we focus on how motivation, knowledge, and skills can increase effective intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 1994). SEDL believes that improving intercultural communication offers great hope for teachers in meeting the needs of their students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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[5] It should be noted that the scope of this paper does not fully capture the complexity of factors affecting academic performance of CLD students. For instance, we recognize that factors such as religion, gender, and socioeconomic status comprise some of the sociocultural variables that are encompassed under culture. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address all of these factors in equal depth.

II. Conceptual Foundations of Intercultural Communication

"Culture is communication and communication is culture." (Hall, 1981, p. 186)

As the term "intercultural communication" suggests, there are two major concepts that need discussion: culture and communication. Jandt (1995) stresses that culture and communication are inseparable. "Culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. Communication requires coding and symbols that must be learned and shared" (p. 22). Our communication with others is greatly influenced by our cultural backgrounds. To understand how people from different cultures interact, we must have a basic understanding of the communication process and how culture influences our interactions.

Culture

"One of the major factors influencing our effectiveness in communicating with people from other cultures is our ability to understand their cultures" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). In order to understand specific cultures it is important to first understand some concepts relating to culture in general. This section describes culture, how it is acquired, the relationship between the mainstream and nonmainstream cultural groups in the U.S., and how culture impacts the classroom.

- **Culture refers to a social system shared by a group of people that defines how its members perceive, think about, and interact with the world.**

Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of culture, there are several characteristics of culture that are important to consider. First, culture is concerned with group behavior. Cultural characteristics are shared with others from the same cultural background. Second, culture is complex and dynamic. Nieto (1992) recognized both of these characteristics

when she wrote that culture is "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion" (p. 111). Third, culture defines a group's perspective about the world and how its members interact with it. Saravia-Shore and Arvizu (1992) observe that "culture guides people in their thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. xxvii). Fourth, culture limits the range of acceptable behaviors, providing the "blueprint" (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998) that humans need for generally accepted and patterned ways of behavior. Bullivant (1993) concludes that culture is "a social group's design for surviving in and adapting to its environment" (p. 29). Culture provides order and meaning and allows individuals to predict the behaviors of others in the same cultural group.

Culture influences every aspect of one's thinking and behaving. These influences often go unnoticed because much of culture is hidden or invisible. Hidden characteristics of culture are those norms of thinking and acting that are so ingrained that many individuals are unaware of their cultural grounding (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Two examples are the proximity with which people stand in conversation and the expectations for children in their interactions with adults. When expectations of what is considered acceptable are violated, cultural clashes are likely to occur.

- **Culture is acquired via the process of socialization and greatly contributes to self-identity.**

Socialization is "the total set of experiences in which children participate so that they eventually cease to be totally confused and instead become respected members of a culture" (Brislin, 1993, p. 95). It is through socialization that children learn such things as grooming and dress; how to interact with others; rules, norms, values, and beliefs; and the cognitive

orientations and learning styles of their culture. Typically, parents and other important adults in a child's life will be the major instruments of socialization. As children become older, their siblings and peers also play an important role in socialization.

Although socialization into a cultural group contributes greatly to individuals' self-identity, there are other influences (Samovar & Porter, 1995). For instance, as humans, we share some universal characteristics and needs that cut across all cultures (e.g., we all experience birth and death; we all communicate with others; we all experience emotions, although perhaps not in the same way). Individuals also see themselves in relation to the roles they play in society and the social groups to which they belong. These roles and group memberships also shape their identities and influence the ways in which they interact with others. Finally, an individual's self-identity is shaped by her unique personality and life experiences. Because of this, individuals sometimes hold beliefs and values different from those predominating in their culture. It is important, therefore, not to assume that every member of a group or culture will think and act in the exact same way. It should be noted, too, that cultures vary in the degree to which they accept such differences.

- **The U.S. has mainstream and nonmainstream cultural groups with differing amounts of power.**

The U.S., like many countries, is comprised of a number of cultural groups in addition to the national (mainstream) culture. U.S. mainstream culture is usually described as reflecting the values of white, upper- and middle-class men because it is this group that has established and maintained the major institutions in the U.S. There are many recognized nonmainstream cultures in the U.S. that reflect the values and traditions of different ethnic or racial groups, geographical regions, or religions. The members of these cultural groups, while influenced in varying degrees

by mainstream culture, commonly share beliefs and values that differ from those of the larger, mainstream culture.

Members of nonmainstream cultural groups generally have less power than the mainstream group (Jandt, 1995). Power is defined as having the ability to make important decisions that impact others (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). Often this power is vested in government, business, educational systems, and other institutions that reflect the values and beliefs of those who established them and who have, over succeeding generations, continued to run them (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). Members of nonmainstream cultural groups must interact daily with institutions that embody the mainstream culture, a culture that may not reflect or reinforce their own beliefs and values (Scheurich, 1993) and that often impedes their efforts to succeed. Such individuals must often adapt their behaviors in order to be successful in mainstream settings.

- **Culture has a significant impact on the classroom.**

Both teachers and students bring to school their own cultural backgrounds, many characteristics which are hidden from themselves and each other. Teachers' cultural backgrounds influence their philosophy of education, the materials they choose, their methods of instruction, and their expectations of, and interactions with their students (Greenfield et. al, 1995; Zeichner, 1993). Teachers are likely to rely on their own cultural norms (Hollins, 1996) and teach according to how they were taught and how they learn best. In a similar fashion, cultural background influences the ways in which students learn, how they interact with adults and their peers, and the different roles that school and home play in their lives. When teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds, their expectations for acceptable behavior often clash because of this hidden dimension of culture (Greenfield et al., 1995). The great

majority of these cultural clashes occur despite an individual's good intentions; each individual acts from his own cultural perspective, but fails to realize that it is not congruent with the other's view (Brislin, 1993).

One consequence of cultural clashes is that pre-held beliefs or stereotypes can be reinforced in teachers, leading to lower expectations for their CLD students. This is a well-documented phenomenon (Brophy & Good, 1970; 1974; Good, 1987; Rong, 1996). If students do not meet the expectations of a teacher, they are perceived as being either incapable or unwilling learners and are called on less often and asked lower-order questions. In short, they are not challenged. Students may come to believe that the teacher's low expectations reflect a true assessment of their abilities and will then often engage in behavior that reinforces those expectations.

Another consequence of cultural clashes is that students are sometimes forced to choose between their home culture and the mainstream school culture (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). At an early age, students are not likely to see this as an option; their home culture is all they know. As students grow older and continue to experience cultural clashes at school, they begin to see that their cultural ways of knowing and doing are not reflected or reinforced in the classroom. This can cause great confusion and inner turmoil since culture greatly influences students' identities. In effect, many students see themselves as not valued. Some will be able to assimilate to the mainstream culture and be successful at school, but at the expense of maintaining their home cultural values and traditions (which can cause conflict at home). Others will either be unable or unwilling to assimilate and many of these will fail in school.

Cultural clashes do not always result in such dire consequences. There are schools that create educational environments in which CLD students are successful (Scheurich, 1997);

environments where teachers have high expectations for CLD students and where students are not forced to choose between their home culture and the school culture, but actually maintain both. Success for CLD students depends in large part on how schools frame the problem of underachievement. When the term "at-risk" is used to describe students, the students are seen as the problem. Rather, educators need to examine the problematic learning environments in which students are placed (Garcia & Dominguez, 1997). Similarly, when cultural and linguistic differences are seen as the cause of failure for CLD students, educators are likely to ignore the learning environments in which these students are placed. If, however, educators understand that the learning difficulties of many CLD students reflect cultural incongruities between the students and themselves, they are more likely to create learning environments that are responsive to students' educational needs and learning characteristics (Garcia & Dominguez, 1997). Students, then, are much more likely to succeed.

Communication

Communication occurs because individuals have a need to connect and interact with others (Samovar & Porter, 1995). It provides a shared experience and the opportunity to share our knowledge about life with others.

Although everyone learns how to communicate early in life, communication is a very complex process. A group's culture will influence its members' beliefs about what constitutes acceptable communication.[6] For instance, culture instructs its members about acceptable conversation for specific situations, how close individuals should stand when communicating, and how direct they should be in expressing their wants and needs (Jandt, 1995). When expectations about these behaviors are violated, communication breaks down and individuals are

[6] The authors recognize that gender also influences the communication process; however, a discussion of its these influences is beyond the scope of this paper.

often left wondering what went wrong. This confusion occurs because communication is so familiar to us we often do not stop and think about what takes place when we communicate with others. Understanding the process of communication is essential if we are to become skilled at communicating with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) make the following fundamental points about the communication process.

- **Communication is a symbolic activity.**

Symbols are used to represent the thoughts and ideas individuals want to communicate to each other. Words (spoken and written), signs in sign language, gestures, facial expressions, and objects such as stoplights all have meaning. Through socialization, individuals learn the meaning that specific symbols have for their particular group. Agreeing on symbols and their meaning allows people to communicate more effectively.

- **Communication involves the transmission and interpretation of messages.**

Messages can reflect the sender's thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. The sender encodes these messages in symbols (e.g., words) and transmits them via a particular channel (e.g., voice, writing, gesturing) to a receiver, who must then interpret the message. Both people will bring to this process their own experiences, in addition to their cultural and social backgrounds. As a result, the interpretation of a message may not coincide with the meaning the sender had in mind. For example, a teacher who tells his students, "Get to work," may mean they should stop talking, get out their books, and work independently on the assignment. Students whose previous experiences have been more cooperative, however, may interpret "Get to work" differently. They may assume they should discuss among themselves the questions to be answered.

Other factors also influence interpretation. How a message is expressed, the context in which it is delivered, and the relationship between the sender and the receiver all affect the way

the communication will be understood. If the partners in an interaction do not know each other, the receiver will draw on what he knows about the sender's group membership(s) to help him interpret the message. Having more accurate knowledge about the sender's group(s) can facilitate effective communication.

- **Communication takes place at varying levels of awareness.**

Sometimes we are very aware of the communication process. When a teacher is in conflict with a student and is motivated to resolve the conflict, she becomes aware of how communication may be breaking down. For example, she is likely to scrutinize what she says and how she says it, and question whether the student understands what she means and whether she is accurately interpreting what the student is saying. Most daily communication, however, occurs without the parties stopping to think, "Am I making sense to this person?" or, "Do I really understand what this person means?"

- **Intention is not a necessary condition for communication.**

Communication behavior is based on three sources: intentions, habits, and emotions. Any behavior or its absence communicates something if there is someone in the environment to observe the behavior or its absence (Gudyknunst, 1994). Thus, we communicate much information to others without intending to do so. For example, body language often suggests messages (e.g., impatience, attentiveness) to others, whether intended or not. Many cultural clashes can be attributed to the unintentional behavior of an individual from one culture being perceived, interpreted, and reacted to by an individual from another culture.

When we react out of habit or emotions, we do not provide ourselves with instructions about how to communicate. Though such behavior lacks intention, we nonetheless transmit messages to the receiver. In other words, we communicate information to others, verbally and

nonverbally, even without meaning to do so. Even silence in the right context can communicate a message.

- **Individuals make predictions about the outcomes of their communication.**

Individuals make predictions about the outcomes of their communications, expecting that a communication with a certain form and content will produce certain results. Such predictions are made on the basis of their knowledge of the culture's routines, and their expectations that others share their knowledge as well. After publicizing the time that school begins, for example, school personnel expect parents to get their children to school on time without further communication. Similarly, after scheduling a conference with a parent, teachers expect the parent to keep the appointment on time. When teachers' predictions about parents' behaviors do not come true, frustration and conflict, or withdrawal from interactions can occur. While knowing the routines and practices of a particular culture allows for more accurate predictions, not knowing them increases the chances for miscommunication and hard feelings.

- **Communication involves the creation of meaning.**

Effective communication depends on two or more partners exchanging messages, interpreting their meaning, checking with the sender to determine the accuracy of understanding, and repeating the process. By checking and clarifying, and then repeating the process, the partners come to understand each other and create meaning. Meaning must be created because language is inherently ambiguous. For example the verb in the statements, "I love pizza," "I love my work," and "I love my spouse," has vastly different meanings. In addition, because people have different backgrounds, they will have different ideas of what words mean and how they should be used. Because language is an imperfect tool for conveying meaning, individuals have to create meaning based on their understanding of language and their experiences and knowledge

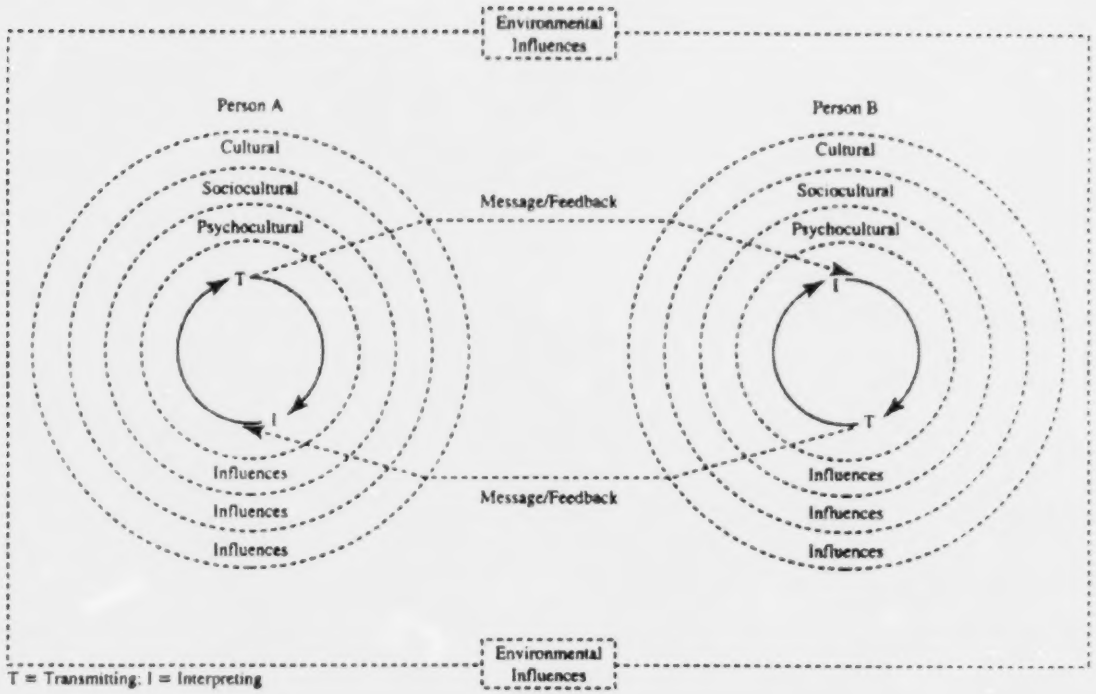
about the world, which will in many ways be different from the knowledge and experiences of others.

A Model of Intercultural Communication

Having explored the nature of culture and communication, we can now present Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) model of ICC (see Figure 1). This model lays the groundwork for further discussion of how differences in cultural background affect communication between teachers and students. While the model represents only two people, it can be extended to include three or more participants. All participants are influenced by their cultural, sociocultural, and psychocultural backgrounds when they communicate. Each person transmits and interprets messages and feedback. The entire process is influenced by the environment in which the communication takes place. The dashed lines represent the fact that communication is a dynamic, ever-changing process.

Figure 1

Intercultural Communication Model



Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1997). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Reprinted with permission.

Every communication is affected by the environment in which it takes place. Environmental influences include the physical environment, the situation, the situational norms and rules (which vary by culture), and the psychological environment (or how people view the physical environment and use it in their interactions with others). Culture influences how members of a group transmit and interpret messages and feedback. Sociocultural influences, the influences exerted by an individual's group affiliations within a given culture, also play a role. So, too, do psychocultural factors, such as our stereotypes and prejudices (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

The elements of uncertainty and anxiety underlie all communication. They are especially noticeable in novel situations such as interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Uncertainty, a cognitive response, can be defined as the inability to predict or explain others' behaviors, feelings, attitudes, or values (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Because communication is imperfect, reducing uncertainty becomes an ongoing process of checking and rechecking each other's meanings and then modifying our messages.

Anxiety, an emotional response, arises from our fear of negative consequences from interactions with others (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Managing one's anxiety makes it easier to access the information needed when communication is not automatic, and also helps to keep emotional reactions in check. Managing uncertainty and anxiety are usually reciprocal processes. Reducing uncertainty will generally result in the reduction of anxiety and vice versa. If anxiety is at a minimum, individuals are more likely to access the communication skills needed to communicate effectively.

Uncertainty and anxiety are unavoidable aspects of communication. In fact, minimum levels of both maintain our motivation to communicate. Managing anxiety and uncertainty,

therefore, does not mean completely eliminating them. Too much uncertainty and anxiety, however, keeps individuals from communicating effectively with others. We can manage these two reactions by being mindful of the process of communication described earlier. Being able to more accurately predict and explain other people's behavior also serves to reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Skill at predicting and explaining requires an accurate knowledge of individual and group differences.

In applying intercultural communication to the classroom, SEDL recognizes two domains of interactions: those that pertain to instruction, and those that pertain to relational matters. The *instructional* domain consists of, but is not limited to the direct teaching of content; developing and structuring classroom activities, assignments and routines; providing directions; asking and answering questions; testing; and teaching higher-order thinking skills. The *relational* domain consists of three types of interactions—those involving behavior management, those intended to foster the student's psychosocial development, and those used to support parent engagement. Behavior management involves praising, rewarding, and disciplining. Fostering psychosocial development includes validating and building a student's self-esteem, providing constructive feedback, managing conflict, and using humor. Supporting parent engagement involves delivering school information (e.g., explaining classroom expectations or school policies); providing feedback about the student's participation (e.g., academic performance, behavior); and asking for assistance in the delivery of instruction (e.g., reading to the student, helping with homework, helping in the classroom, serving as a site-based team member), in behavior management, and in managing conflict. We have included parent engagement in this section because parental attitudes about other racial and ethnic groups are often unconsciously passed on

to students and may influence students' interactions with teachers (Tatum, 1997; McLemore, 1994; Engram, 1982).

The relational domain of intercultural communication is often more critical than the instructional in determining whether the student is receptive to education. A growing body of literature supports the importance of caring teacher-student relationships to the academic success of CLD students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Grossman, 1995; Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Scheurich, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1996). Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that students will profit most from positive relationships, where there is mutual trust and where the individuals involved are compatible in terms of goals, expectations, and role demands. Students (and their parents) who feel invalidated and demoralized because of their cultural differences will not trust teachers, and, as a result, little learning will occur. Successful teaching of CLD students depends on treating them with care, respect, and appreciation (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is incumbent upon the teacher to create a classroom environment in which all students feel valued and capable of academic success. Cultural clashes pertaining to the instructional and relational domains of intercultural communication will be described in the following two sections.

III. Cultural Influences on the Communication Process:

Dimensions of Cultural Variability

Understanding ways in which groups are similar and different is essential to interacting successfully with people from other cultural backgrounds. A number of cultural dimensions have been identified and described in the literature. Hofstede (1997) defines a dimension as "an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (p. 14). These dimensions are important because they help explain people's cultural behaviors. The dimensions we consider represent orientations people have in relating to their world. Each dimension should be viewed as a continuum. Cultures fall at different places along the continuum, but no culture exists at either extreme. Understanding cultural dimensions can help teachers appreciate the ways in which culture influences their communication with their CLD students.

We draw on the work of Hofstede (1984, 1997) and Hall (1989) to describe dimensions of cultural variability. Hofstede and his colleagues conducted a study for IBM in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They collected responses to questionnaires from over 116,000 people in forty different countries. Using statistical and theoretical analyses, Hofstede concluded that there are "four main dimensions along which dominant value systems in the forty countries can be ordered and which affect human thinking, organizations, and institutions in predictable ways" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 11). These dimensions are individualism/collectivism (the degree to which a culture emphasizes the individual or the group), power distance (the degree to which members of a culture accept a hierarchical distribution of power), uncertainty avoidance (the degree to which members of a culture seek to avoid ambiguity in interactions), and masculinity/femininity (the degree to which a culture emphasizes power and achievement versus caring and quality of life. Hofstede (1984) describes these four dimensions in terms of national cultures, but we relate them

to the different cultural groups (both mainstream and nonmainstream) represented in U.S. schools.

Hall (1989) studied dimensions of cultural variability pertaining to time, space, and high- and low-context communication. High- and low-context communication is the degree to which people rely on context and nonverbal signals to communicate meaning. This dimension is highly correlated with the dimension of individualism/collectivism. Members of individualist cultures generally prefer low-context communication, while members of collectivist cultures generally have a high-context communication style.

The dimensions described by Hofstede and Hall are not a complete list of dimensions of cultural variability. Because of space constraints, we focus on individualism/collectivism, high- and low-context communication, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. All of these dimensions are complex. For the purposes of this paper we touch on only their most basic elements as they pertain to teacher-student interactions. Cultural differences, such as those depicted in these dimensions of cultural variability, are important for teachers to know about in order to recognize cultural clashes in the classroom. Understanding that cultural differences impacts their communication with their students helps teachers become competent at intercultural communication (Archer, 1994, Au, 1981; Delpit, 1995; García & Dominguez, 1997).

Individualism/collectivism. The dimension of individualism/collectivism has been researched and discussed more than any other in the literature. This dimension refers to the degree to which a culture emphasizes either the individual or the collective group (Hofstede, 1997). Members of individualist cultures tend to place a high value on self-reliance, hedonism, competition, and individual achievement (Triandis, 1995). Members of collectivist cultures tend

to place a high value on good social relationships and to give greater valence to group harmony and group goals than to personal desires and preferences. Members of individualist cultures base their identity on their possessions and their experiences, whereas members of collectivist cultures define themselves according to their relationships and group memberships.

A key element that distinguishes individualist and collectivist cultures is how they conceptualize group membership and acceptable ways to interact with other group members. Members of individualist cultures may belong to many different groups (e.g., family, church, professional, and social). No one group has a great deal of influence over its members, although some groups (e.g., family) will likely have more influence than others. Members of collectivist cultures make a sharp distinction between the groups they belong to (their in-groups) and other groups (their out-groups). They tend to belong to fewer in-groups than members of individualist cultures and to rank these groups differently in order of importance. Their predominant friendships most often are stable relationships formed early in life, and these take precedence over out-group relationships. Members of collectivist cultures are highly influenced by their group memberships. For example, members of collectivist cultures tend to be more influenced by their extended family than do members of individualist cultures.

Different orientations to group membership can result in cultural clashes in the classroom (Hofstede, 1997). In classrooms where the teacher is from an individualist background and students are from a collectivist background, conflicting expectations often occur. Teachers with an individualist orientation, for example, are likely to expect each student to make an individual contribution to a class discussion, but students from a collectivist background may prefer to confer with their classmates prior to giving input. Susan Philips (1983) found that Native American students were more comfortable and more successful working in small groups with

guidance and facilitation from the teacher. European American students, on the other hand, were more comfortable and more successful when learning was structured to provide opportunities for independent work.

How groups conceptualize the purpose of education also distinguishes individualist and collectivist cultures. students from collectivist cultures focus on learning the skills and virtues necessary to be an acceptable group member. Tradition is considered highly important. In individualist cultures, students focus on learning how to learn, in order to cope with new situations. This difference has a tremendous impact on teachers', students', and parents' expectations for what should be taught, how it should be taught, and who is responsible for teaching it.

In the U.S., which is characterized as a highly individualistic culture, individualism is reflected in the classroom, as evidenced by the dictums, "Keep your eyes on your own paper" and "Don't talk with your neighbors," in addition to report-card comments such as, "Johnny is able to work independently." Grading systems, honor roles, and recognition of one student as valedictorian of a school also reflect individualism. In collectivist cultures, individuals place greater value on group harmony and group goals. This is illustrated by the Japanese dictum, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down."

This dimension also has implications for deciding when to discipline a student. Oftentimes what is considered acceptable behavior depends on the context of a particular situation. Collectivist cultures expect behavior in particular situations to a greater degree than individualist cultures. Triandis (1995) points out that students with a collectivist orientation are more influenced by the context of a situation than students with an individualist orientation. Identifying situation-specific, acceptable behavior for students from collectivist cultures can be

very difficult for teachers with an individualist orientation, but is crucial if teachers are to provide culturally responsive discipline. Punishing students for behaviors that are acceptable in their own culture is likely to alienate them, so teachers must be able to view this behavior from a culturally relevant perspective and then explain to students what has happened and what behavior was expected. For example, students from collectivist cultures may help other students complete their work; teachers from individualist cultures might view this help as students cheating or not doing their own work. Teachers must teach the expectations of the mainstream culture while at the same time showing respect for their students' culture.

When students do misbehave and they understand that they are misbehaving, teachers must know how to discipline them in a culturally responsive manner, as there are cultural differences here as well. Students from individualist cultures see conflict as a means of learning and therefore expect a direct approach to discipline. In contrast, students from collectivist cultures are concerned about the feelings of others and avoid embarrassing members of the in-group (Triandis, 1995). Whereas it might be acceptable for a teacher with an individualist orientation to respond to a student from an individualist background by saying before the whole class, "I'm extremely disappointed in your behavior," this would not be a culturally responsive way to discipline a student from a collectivist background. According to Hofstede (1997), it is important for teachers to know that harmony and saving face are central values for students from collectivist cultures. Correcting such students should involve pulling the student aside and invoking the group's honor. The reprimand, "Your behavior reflected badly on our class," would be a culturally congruent response for a student with a collectivist orientation.

Another way teachers deal with behavior management is through reinforcement systems. Teachers in U.S. classrooms lean heavily toward systems that reward individual achievement

with tangible tokens or points. To a child from a collectivist culture, oriented toward being part of the group (i.e., not being set apart as better or different), participating in this type of system will be difficult. To ensure that students from both individualist and collectivist cultures are included equitably in a reinforcement system, teachers must reward both individual and group efforts.

High- and low-context communication. High- and low-context communication refers to the amount of explicit information that is necessary to communicate messages effectively (Hall, 1989). Cultural groups that have a low-context communication orientation, like U.S. mainstream culture, send messages that contain most of the information in the explicit code (e.g., the actual statements we make). Statements such as, "Say what you mean," "Get to the point," and "What's the bottom line?" illustrate the kind of direct and precise communication that is valued by members of low-context cultures. If a teacher from a low-context orientation wanted to send the message for students to pay attention and start their work, he might announce to the students, "Please stop talking and get out your books."

Cultures with a high-context communication orientation, on the other hand, send messages in which the socio-cultural context of the communication is highly important. Much of the information is not explicitly stated but is embedded in the context of the communication. In contrast to the example above, if a teacher with a high-context orientation wanted students to settle down and get started on their work, she might say, "The bell has rung." In addition, because members of high-context cultures belong to few in-groups, and because those groups play an important role in their lives, they will share with other members a great deal of group information and a highly developed sense of group identity. In order to communicate effectively with members of high-context, collectivist cultures, it is important to understand their group

affiliations, since much of the meaning of their messages will be embedded in that knowledge and that identity. Individuals with a low-context orientation, in contrast, typically belong to more groups, but the members of those circles share a less well-defined group identity and group knowledge (Brislin, 1993; Hall, 1989).

Whereas individuals with a low-context communication style are characterized as direct and explicit, individuals with a high-context communication style are characterized as providing rich detail and depending on shared experiences from which listeners can infer the meaning of a message (Hall, 1989). Listening, which is often perceived to be a passive activity by members of low-context cultures, is a very active process for members of high-context cultures. Nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice, gestures, posture, the use of the eyes, physical proximity to another) are also very important in high-context cultures, as is silence, which can convey a number of meanings, but which is seen as uncomfortable "dead space" by the majority of individuals with a low-context communication style (Hall, 1989).

The discrepancy between these two orientations is particularly evident during story time and in written narratives. Whereas students with a low-context orientation learn to tell and write stories using a logical-sequential framework, students with a high- context orientation focus their story telling and written narratives around episodic events that revolve around people and their relationships (Hyon & Sulzby, 1992; Mikkelsen, 1990). For teachers with a low-context orientation, these stories can appear to consist of random, disconnected snippets that are not structured, have no flow, and follow no rules.

This dimension also impacts behavior management. In the case of a child who is talking to a classmate about last night's football game, rather than doing his math assignment, a teacher with a low-context orientation might redirect the student's attention by saying something like,

"Joaquin, stop talking and get busy doing your work." In contrast, a teacher with a high-context communication orientation might use nonverbal cues such as a long, silent stare of disapproval to let the child know that his behavior is unacceptable and that he needs to turn his attention to the task at hand. Teachers and students will naturally attempt to communicate with each other in the style with which they are familiar and which they expect from others in their cultural group. If their styles are incongruous, it can lead to miscommunication and bewilderment at why their efforts to communicate are offending others.

Again, no culture exists at either extreme end of the continuum and behavior on both ends of the continuum can be found in members of a culture. In the U.S., where mainstream communication is very low context, teachers can sometimes employ a high-context style of communication and be indirect in interacting with their students (Hall, 1989). Classroom routines, for example, serve to cue students as to what is acceptable behavior for specific parts of the day. In addition, some teachers use oblique statements, such as, "Isn't Susie working quietly?" to encourage others to stop talking and get to work. Overall, however, U.S. teachers from the cultural mainstream are likely to use a low-context style of communication.

Power distance. Power distance is defined as "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 47). This dimension pertains to relationships among people of different status. Individuals from high–power-distance cultures accept differences in the distribution of power as a basic fact of society, and expect clear delineation and distance between superiors and subordinates. Subordinates in high–power-distance cultures expect to be told what to do by authority figures and do not question their directives. In low–power-distance cultures, subordinates readily approach authorities and even contradict them, expecting to know the

"why" behind their directives. They are also less reliant on authority than are members of high–power-distance cultures and prefer to work collaboratively and in consultation with authorities. U.S. mainstream culture is considered to reflect a moderately low–power-distance orientation (Hofstede, 1997).

Members of high–power-distance cultures place great value on their children's being obedient, and students place a high value on authority. The educational system of these cultures revolves around the expertise and excellence of teachers, who are treated with utmost respect. Education is teacher-centered and students expect guidance and direction from their instructors, even in higher education. Teachers initiate all communication and run classrooms that are strictly ordered. In addition, students do not contradict or criticize their teachers, parents support teachers when children misbehave, and physical punishment (e.g., spanking) is seen as an acceptable means to emphasize the distance between teachers and students.

In contrast, parents and teachers in low–power-distance cultures encourage children to be independent and to experiment, and they promote an educational process that is student-oriented, with an emphasis on student initiative. Students are encouraged to speak up and ask questions, and even to openly disagree with their teachers. Educators consider two-way communication to be essential for successful learning and appreciate the students' need for independence. When children misbehave, parents often side with them rather than with their teachers. Physical punishment is unacceptable and is considered by some to be child abuse (Hofstede, 1997).

Cultural differences in power distance can also affect interactions between parents and teachers. For example, parents from high–power-distance backgrounds view teachers as authorities in education and are likely to defer educational decisions to them. Parents' cultural assumptions regarding the roles of teachers and parents may be violated when teachers try to

involve them in educational activities and decisions. Therefore, although they will usually agree to teachers' requests out of deference to their authority (even if the assignment seems inappropriate), they may disagree with what they have been asked to do. They are not likely to openly question teachers' requests; instead, their disagreement may be expressed by ignoring the requests and not following through on them.

Conversely, parents from a low–power-distance background are more likely than parents from high–power-distance cultures to approach teachers about collaborating with them on their child's school work. They are also more likely to openly question the amount of homework and the validity of specific homework assignments. As with students, school expectations should be explained to parents, rather than assuming they know or share the same expectations. Also, teachers should support parents in meeting these expectations. Teacher requests are much more likely to be fulfilled if the demands of the task match the parent's skills and interest and reflect awareness of cultural assumptions and expectations.

Uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which members of a cultural group feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity in situations, and is reflected in a need for predictability (Hofstede, 1997). In order to avoid ambiguous situations, members of high–uncertainty-avoidance cultures rely on an intricate system of formal rules that prescribe acceptable ways to act and interact. These individuals prefer to avoid conflict, but may engage in aggressive or risk-taking behaviors if such action will reduce uncertainty. When interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, individuals from high–uncertainty-avoidance cultures may be very formal and polite. If their rule systems come into conflict with the rule systems of others, however, they will likely ignore the others altogether. In contrast, members of low–uncertainty-avoidance cultures are able to function easily in ambiguous circumstances.

They are able to accept different ways of looking at phenomena in the world, even if they do not adhere to those ways. Avoiding uncertainty/ambiguity is not highly valued.[5]

Students from high–uncertainty-avoidance cultures are more likely to prefer structured learning environments with precise objectives, clear instruction, detailed assignments, and strict timetables. They may seek one correct answer and expect to be rewarded for accuracy. In addition, they are likely to be less comfortable with change and competition. In contrast, students from low–uncertainty-avoidance cultures are socialized to value broad, open-ended learning assignments with no timetables. They are likely to be competitive self-initiators, and they expect to be rewarded for originality in their answers to problems.

Members of high–uncertainty-avoidance cultures view teachers as experts and parents as laypersons. Teachers bring parents into their classrooms as audiences, but they are not consulted. Intellectual disagreement with a teacher qualifies as personal disloyalty. Conversely, in low–uncertainty-avoidance cultures, it is acceptable for teachers to admit they do not know the answers to specific questions. Intellectual disagreement with a teacher is seen as stimulating. Teachers try to get parents involved in their children's education and actively seek parents' ideas.

A cultural clash pertaining to uncertainty avoidance is likely to occur when a teacher gives students an assignment with few explicit instructions. If the teacher and students share a

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[5] U.S. mainstream culture is considered to be moderately low–uncertainty-avoidance oriented. This may be confusing since U.S. mainstream culture also is considered to have a low-context communication style (i.e., preferring direct and explicit messages). All people, regardless of their orientation on the dimension of high- and low-context communication, attempt to avoid uncertainty when communicating. The motivation behind the use of direct and explicit messages when communicating with individuals from a low-context orientation is that they have many in-groups and cannot rely on the context of situations to make their messages understood. It is this reliance on context that distinguishes individuals with a high- and low-context style of communication, not a great desire to avoid uncertainty. Therefore, individuals with a low-context communication style can have either a high– or low–uncertainty-avoidance orientation.

low–uncertainty-avoidance orientation, the task will probably be accomplished with little friction, for the students are more accustomed to open-ended tasks. In contrast, students from high–uncertainty-avoidance cultures are more likely to seek feedback and reassurance while doing the assignment. Teachers from low–uncertainty-avoidance cultures may interpret this response as "dependent and anxious" and perceive these students as "helpless and incapable." In reality, these students have been socialized to conform to teacher expectations and classroom rules and are likely to seek more explicit directions to reduce uncertainty. A culturally-responsive teacher understands the source of her students' behavior, and provides the necessary amount of direction and feedback. At the same time, the teacher provides opportunities for students to become more comfortable with open-ended assignments, helping them be successful in the mainstream classroom. Essentially, culturally responsive teachers are able to structure learning environments in ways that support the development of students becoming bicultural.

In conclusion, these four dimensions of cultural variability provide a lens for understanding how cultural background influences people's behaviors. Culture especially influences the ways in which we communicate. Understanding this fact will help teachers see that behavior that appears to be unacceptable may be the result of different cultural norms, rather than the result of inability or lack of effort or respect. It is not necessary for teachers to know where every culture falls on these dimensions. What is important is to understand the broad range of possibilities in ways of thinking and behaving and how they influence interactions between teachers and students. Understanding this range is the first step to building a cultural knowledge base about students' cultures. With this knowledge, teachers can build a more culturally responsive educational program that meets the needs and goals of all their students and their families. Knowledge of cultural differences is one of the factors described in the next

section, which explores the tools needed to be effective at intercultural communication. Our discussion will apply these findings to teacher-student interactions in the classroom.

IV. Factors That Influence Effective Intercultural Communication

There are a number of factors that determine whether individuals will be competent at ICC (see Table1). Gudykunst (1994), borrowing from the work of Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), groups these factors under the rubrics of motivation, knowledge, and skills.

> Motivation refers to our desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with others. Of particular importance to the present analysis is our motivation to communicate with people who are different. Knowledge refers to our awareness or understanding of what needs to be done in order to communicate appropriately and effectively. Skills are our abilities to engage in the behaviors necessary to communicate appropriately and effectively. (Gudykunst, 1994, p. 162)

Motivation, knowledge, and skills are all necessary to be competent at ICC.

Motivation

Many things motivate individuals to communicate with people from cultural backgrounds different from their own, including the need to belong, the desire for community harmony, and various attractions for other people (Gudykunst, 1993). In addition, most of us are motivated to communicate by a true desire to learn—about others and ourselves—and by a desire to have others learn about us (Gudykunst, 1993).

Teachers are also motivated by their desire to help all students learn and be successful, in addition to their desire to be part of the school community. Thus, teachers are motivated to communicate with their students because communication is an integral part of the teaching and

Table 1

Factors Influencing Effective ICC

Motivation
Need to belong
Need for group harmony
Attractions for people
Desire to learn
Desire to help students learn
Expectations
Need to sustain our self-conceptions
Degree of anxiety
Nature of interaction (whether positive or negative)
Approach/avoidance tendencies

Knowledge
Cultural self-awareness
Knowledge of group differences
Knowledge of personal similarities
Knowledge of alternative interpretations
Knowledge of how to gather information

Skills
Being mindful
Tolerating ambiguity
Managing anxiety
Empathizing
Adapting one's behavior
Making predictions about and explaining other's behaviors accurately

learning process. Several other factors influence teachers' motivation as the following example demonstrates.

A European American teacher, Mrs. Rigby, is teaching a first-grade class of culturally diverse students. One of her students, Que, was born in the U.S. to immigrant Vietnamese parents. Que, having been raised with the cultural values of her parents, reflects many characteristics of high-context, indirect communication in her interactions with others. Mrs. Rigby, on the other hand, demonstrates a preference for a direct, low-context communication style. During the first month of school Mrs. Rigby and Que have clashed over this. Mrs. Rigby is frustrated by Que's indirectness. In fact, almost daily Mrs. Rigby says things like: "Say what you mean," and "Come on honey, tell me what you need. We haven't got all day." Que, who is communicating the way she effectively communicates at home, reacts with embarrassment and begins to feel confused and incompetent. One day Que approaches the teacher to inform her that one of the other students has taken her notebook. She begins by recreating the context of the event for Mrs. Rigby, by describing the events leading up to the incident. Mrs. Rigby, who is dealing with two other problems at the same time, turns to Que and says rather forcefully, "Que, I don't have time for your rambling. Get to the point!" At this, Que becomes silent and goes back to her seat.

This scenario illustrates several factors that affect teachers' motivation to communicate with their CLD students, including expectations, the need to sustain our self-conceptions, degree of anxiety, the nature of interactions, and approach/avoidance tendencies. Mrs. Rigby and Que have conflicting expectations about how to communicate, based on their own cultural norms. Both Mrs. Rigby and Que expect that the other will behave in a predictable manner. Having shared norms and rules of communication makes communication more efficient and gives us a

sense of competence. In the example above, differences in cultural assumptions have made it very difficult for each participant to accurately predict the communicative behavior of the other, negatively affecting their motivation to continue to interact. The teacher's ability to deal with these differences when students do not meet their cultural expectations depends on the amount of cultural knowledge they possess about the student. In the absence of such information, they are likely to make incorrect assessments about their CLD students, further derailing the communication process. Mrs. Rigby assumes that Que is unable to communicate effectively rather than considering that her communication style might be rooted in her cultural background. Que, on the other hand, concludes that Mrs. Rigby is uncaring because she perceives Mrs. Rigby as not wanting to take the time to patiently listen to her concerns. She, too, does not realize that the teacher is also acting from her own culturally bound communication style. Though both attributions are inaccurate, continuing miscommunication is likely to reinforce these beliefs for both individuals.

As we observed earlier, a large body of research exists on teachers' expectations of their students (Brophy & Good, 1970; 1974; Good, 1987; Rong, 1996). Student success is negatively associated with low teacher expectations, and teachers are less motivated to teach students whom they perceive to be "difficult to teach." Similarly, students who perceive that their teachers do not value their contribution may not be motivated to participate in the classroom and benefit from instruction. Low student and teacher motivation play off of each other and reduce the desire of teacher and student alike to communicate with one another.

Another factor that influences teacher motivation to engage students in ICC is the need to sustain our self-conceptions, our understanding of who we are (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). When self-conceptions are threatened, individuals often become defensive. Everyone wants to see

themselves as competent communicators. In communicating with those from other cultures, individuals may not receive feedback that validates their sense of self. Because neither Mrs. Rigby nor Que felt that their self-concept was validated, Mrs. Rigby became frustrated and Que was scared and confused; indeed, she came to view the classroom as an unsafe place for her. Primary students tend to withdraw and feel dejected after cultural clashes with their teachers; as students grow older, they are more likely to become defiant (Grossman, 1995). Mrs. Rigby's and Que's failure to be validated hindered the effectiveness of their communication, reinforcing their inaccurate assessment of each other, and decreasing their motivation to communicate further.

Also influencing teachers' motivation to communicate is the degree of anxiety present in their ICC interactions with students (Brislin, 1993; Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). In intercultural communication, anxiety arises when expectations of how others should act are violated, or individuals' self-conceptions are not validated (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). When our anxiety becomes too great, we can no longer think clearly or access the knowledge and skills needed to communicate effectively. This, in turn, hinders our ability to gather information that could reduce uncertainty. In the example above, both Que and Mrs. Rigby experienced heightened anxiety, which contributed to their inability to communicate effectively and could eventually lower their motivation to keep trying.

The positive or negative quality of interactions also plays a role in teachers' motivation. Positive interactions typically reinforce an individual's desire to communicate with cultural others, and negative interactions tend to create an aversion to such contacts. If individuals are not successful in their attempts at intercultural communication, they feel a sense of alienation from the other cultural group. This creates anxiety and causes them to avoid intercultural interactions in the future.

All these factors culminate in teachers' either engaging in communicative interactions or withdrawing from them. Gudykunst (1994) refers to this phenomenon in terms of approach/avoidance tendencies. Many individuals value a pluralistic society and desire to associate comfortably with people from different cultural backgrounds. They periodically approach others who are different, but if these interactions are not positively reinforcing, they will stop making the effort. Mrs. Rigby, feeling incompetent in her attempt to communicate with Que, is more likely to withdraw from the kind of rich communicative interactions needed to teach all children. She is also more likely to develop negative attitudes about students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In future interactions, Mrs. Rigby might question Que's ability to deal with more complex questions because she has not answered simple ones to her satisfaction in the past.

Motivation is the key to whether or not individuals engage in intercultural communication. Understanding the complex dynamics involved in motivation will enable individuals to work through difficult encounters by helping them to be patient, to be less defensive, and to suspend judgment about others until they have further information. Ultimately, this will help them to understand the perspectives of cultures different from their own.

Knowledge

There are different kinds of knowledge that can contribute to one's proficiency at ICC. Five specific types of knowledge are important to intercultural communication in the classroom: cultural self-awareness, knowledge of group differences, knowledge of personal similarities, knowledge of alternative interpretations, and knowledge of strategies to gather information.

Cultural self-awareness involves understanding one's own cultural background, the rules and norms of thinking and behaving in one's culture, and how cultural background influences

beliefs, biases, and values (Lynch & Hanson, 1992; Samovar & Porter, 1995). It represents the foundation of cultural knowledge from which it is possible to make cultural comparisons. Cultural self-awareness is an essential condition for understanding the cultural differences that lead to clashes in the classroom.

To increase self-awareness, teachers must explore how they communicate with others, what they believe about themselves and others, and the values they hold in regard to curriculum, instruction, and discipline, among other things. If teachers can be aware of the influence of their own culture on their beliefs and values, they can see more clearly the culturally-bound differences between their ways of knowing and doing and those of others. If they do not understand that the ways they think and behave are highly influenced by their cultural background, they are not likely to see the validity of different ways. This ethnocentrism will be a serious obstacle to successful intercultural communication.

Having knowledge of group differences is also essential if teachers are to become competent at ICC (Gudykunst, 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1992; Samovar & Porter, 1995). Increasing teachers' knowledge of their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds decreases the likelihood that culturally different behaviors will be attributed to student deficit or disability. Furthermore, if teachers can recognize when cultural norms are influencing their students' behavior, they will not be as likely to take the students' behavior personally and become defensive when that behavior does not meet their expectations. Becoming defensive only hinders one's attempts to communicate. Another hindrance to competent ICC is mistaking stereotypes for true cultural differences (Gudykunst, 1994). In the classroom, one can observe real cultural differences in such areas as learning and cognitive styles, communication, expectations for school, and ways of showing respect. It is important to remember, of course, that these ways of

thinking and doing represent group tendencies and may not hold true for every member of a cultural group.

An example adapted from Greenfield et al. (1995) will illustrate how cultural differences can affect the teaching and learning process. A teacher was conducting a lesson on eggs with her kindergarten class. She began by asking the students to describe eggs by thinking about the times they had cooked and eaten them. When she called on Juan, a Mexican American student, he said, "My abuelita and abuelito come over on Sundays and we cook migas." The teacher responded by saying, "No Juan, I want you to describe eggs," and immediately called on another student who said that eggs were white and hard on the outside and yellow and wet on the inside. To this the teacher said, "That's right, very good." In this incident, the teacher expected students to describe the egg by giving details about its physical appearance. Consistent with his collectivist cultural orientation, Juan's account was relational in that it focused on the social interactions that centered around the eggs; in contrast, the teacher's expectations reflected an orientation toward the physical characteristics of the egg (i.e., object-oriented).

By not recognizing the cultural difference in how students understand and relate to things in their lives, the teacher missed several educational opportunities. First, she could have extended Juan's learning by exploring his answer further. She could have also guided Juan to a different way of learning about eggs, something from which all the students could have benefited. Third, if she had understood the reason for Juan's response, she could have taught her students about cultural differences. Instead, the teacher inadvertently sent Juan the message that the way he thought about and interacted with his world was not valued in her classroom. Teachers who are knowledgeable about cultural differences will be better prepared to recognize them and to respond when such differences influence the teaching/learning process.

Just as it is important to understand about cultural differences, having knowledge of personal similarities will facilitate ICC (Gudykunst, 1994; Samovar & Porter, 1995). Finding commonalities with one another is often the way that people form relationships. Talking about each other's children, discussing shared frustrations and satisfaction with work, and discovering similarities in social roles are all ways people connect with one another. Teachers who use interactive journals have an excellent opportunity to discover things they have in common with their students (e.g., loving a pet). By finding personal similarities, teachers validate their students' experiences and ways of knowing and doing. They can also build educational experiences on this common ground. One way would be to encourage students to write about these shared interests or experiences. Moreover, teachers could take advantage of their students' expertise by using scaffolding, leading students to a greater understanding of the topic by exploring it in yet a series of writings (Gould, 1996). Knowledge of personal similarities can also help the teacher advance her own understanding of other cultures. It is much easier to begin discussing cultural differences when a relationship of some sort has been established than when people are complete strangers.

Knowledge of alternative interpretations entails the realization that culture plays a major role in how we interpret interactions with others (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). Our interpretations depend upon the cultural lens through which the interactions are viewed. Gudykunst (1993, 1994) suggests that individuals often misinterpret others' behaviors in intercultural communication because they do not distinguish among description, interpretation, and evaluation. "Description" involves a person's sensory experience of an interaction (e.g., what was seen or heard). The most objective description is one that renders an accurate, concrete account

of the physical action of an incident. Although description is not entirely culture-free, it is less culturally biased than interpretation or evaluation.

"Interpretation" involves an explanation of why or how something happened, based on our expectations with regard to that event. For example, if a student calls out an answer rather than raising his hand first, the teacher might assume that the student cannot follow rules. The teacher has attributed meaning to the student's behavior based on his own cultural assumptions about acceptable behavior.

"Evaluations," according to Gudykunst (1993, 1994), "are positive or negative judgments concerning the social significance we attribute to behavior: whether or not we like it" (p. 178). The teacher in the above example might judge the volume of the student's response as being "too loud," and because the student has violated the classroom rule of "raise your hand," he might view the student's behavior in general as being "difficult."

Distinguishing among description, interpretation, and evaluation is difficult even when individuals recognize the existence of cultural differences, and understand that their interpretations and evaluations of an event are filtered through a cultural lens. In the example above, it is just as likely that the student is excited about participating in classroom discussions, comes from a cultural background that encourages expressing this excitement, and/or has been in other classrooms that are more flexible with regard to hand raising. Knowing about cultural differences allows teachers to keep observations of their students' behaviors at a descriptive level, withholding judgments until other explanations for their behavior, such as cultural differences, are explored.

Knowledge of how to gather information about those with whom we interact will also enhance our intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 1994; Hollins, 1995, 1996). Teachers

must learn the most effective ways to gather accurate cultural and individual information about their students. It is necessary for them to understand the nature of the experiences that students bring to school in order to make personal connections and to provide support for learning both within and outside the classroom (Hollins, 1996). Hollins (1996) considers that it is especially important for teachers to ask, "What aspects of the students' culture are evident in their social interaction, the perceptions they express, the language they use, and the expectations they hold for the schooling process?" (p.62).

Obtaining culture-specific knowledge, which is knowledge about a particular cultural group (Jandt, 1995), can be a useful tool for teachers with CLD students. It is not reasonable, however, to expect teachers to possess in-depth knowledge about every culture they might encounter. In addition, because there are differences within cultures, relying solely on a culture-specific approach can lead to stereotyped expectations of how all students of a particular group should think and behave.

With those caveats in mind, Hollins (1996) and Gudykunst (1994) describe several ways that teachers can gather both culture-specific information and individual information about their students. One is to observe students' behaviors, both in interaction with others and with the teacher herself. The information gleaned in this manner is limited, however, by the amount of time the teacher can devote to observation and by the extent of the teacher's awareness of cultural variables. It is also limited according to the identity of the other person(s) involved in the interaction and the type of interaction being observed (e.g., formal or informal). Even with these limitations, observation provides valuable insight about how students interact with other communicators in different settings.

Another strategy for soliciting information, both about particular cultures and individual students, is to conduct formal and informal interviews. Interviews can be conducted with students, their parents, and others who have knowledge about the cultural group to which the students belong (i.e., cultural informants). Cultural informants are typically people from the group about whom the teacher is gathering information (Gudykunst, 1994). Other teachers, older students, parents, and community members can sometimes serve in this role. The ability of informants to provide accurate information is highly important. Asking questions of students or other group members is a relatively simple and acceptable way to gather information. Teachers can use journals and other activities (e.g., creating a family tree, interviewing family members about historical events that they may have participated in such as the Vietnam War) or projects that invite students to bring their lives into the classroom and curriculum.

Home visits are an excellent way for teachers to create relationships with their students' families or guardians, as well as to strengthen their relationships with their students. Gathering information in informal settings such as the home is sometimes easier because parents are more relaxed. Soliciting information is also often made easier when the teacher is willing to disclose certain information about herself (Gudykunst, 1994). By doing this, she signals to the parents that sharing this information is normal in the teacher's culture, making it more likely that the parents will reciprocate by offering that information about themselves.

Teachers can also gather information about their students by reviewing written records. Life histories or biographical accounts may have been compiled previously by others. Questionnaires about the backgrounds of students and their families can also provide valuable personal data that may illuminate the experiences that students bring to the classroom. The documentation of a student's past academic performance may also be helpful. Hollins (1996)

cautions that the conclusions teachers draw about their students should be based on multiple sources of information. Teachers who rely on just one data source run the risk of making decisions based on information that may be limited or inaccurate.

Skills

Success in intercultural communication involves knowing what skills are required and then becoming proficient in them. Such proficiency demands a great deal of practice. Teachers' understanding of skills that facilitate communication with their culturally diverse students, must lead to their development and active use on a regular basis so that they can become adept at them. Skills are also tied to motivational factors in ICC. The more skillful a teacher becomes, the more successful she will be at ICC, thereby increasing the motivation to enter into further exchanges. The ICC skills presented in this section include being mindful, tolerating ambiguity, managing anxiety, empathizing, adapting one's behavior, and making predictions about and explaining others' behaviors.

Being mindful refers to awareness of the dynamics taking place in a communicative interaction (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). In intercultural communication these dynamics often center around the cognitive dissonance that stems from one person challenging what another knows to be "true." Challenging an individual's reality often results in interactions that are emotionally charged and can lead to cultural clashes.

When a cultural clash appears imminent, a mindful teacher will be aware of the possibility that he might react emotionally and will attempt to forestall those emotions. Instead of becoming defensive, the teacher will refrain from judging the student's behavior until more information is obtained. Being mindful shows a true commitment to the process of exploring cultural differences that impact intercultural communication. Being mindful of the existence of

different value systems is necessary if we are to "overcome our tendency to interpret strangers' behavior based on our own frame of reference" (Gudykunst, 1994, p. 180).

Tolerating ambiguity means that even when individuals do not have complete information, or the information seems vague or conflicting, they do not abandon their communicative attempts (Brislin, 1993; Gudykunst, 1993, 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1992). Instead, they try to keep their emotional reactions in check and seek out objective information. "Objective information is necessary to understand strangers and accurately predict their behavior" (Gudykunst, 1994, p. 182).

An example of ambiguity in the classroom and the importance of tolerating ambiguity follows. If a student fails to turn in his homework assignments, but nods his head when the teacher reprimands him and tells him to make sure he completes his assignments in the future, the teacher is likely to become miffed if the student still fails to turn them in. If the teacher does not stop to consider that there may be another explanation for the student's behavior, she may conclude that the student is obstinate, lazy, or incapable of doing quality work. Ultimately she may give up trying to teach this student. An alternative explanation, however, may be that in this student's culture it is more honorable to agree than disagree with an authority figure, especially in public, even if the individual cannot accomplish what is being asked. Or the student may be nodding his head to indicate agreement rather than comprehension. In this case, the student could have failed to complete his homework because of a family emergency. Unless the teacher chooses to investigate further, however, she will continue to make negative judgments about the student.

There is great potential for ambiguity anytime individuals engage in intercultural communication. The skill of tolerating ambiguity can be honed by suspending judgment of

others' behaviors, gathering objective information, detaching from emotional involvement so that one does not take interactions personally, and trying to see the perspectives of others. A teacher committed to tolerating ambiguity will put aside her discomfort when an interaction becomes ambiguous and even uncomfortable and will stay with her attempts to communicate with her student.

Managing anxiety is essential if individuals are to communicate effectively with others (Brislin, 1993; Gudykunst, 1993, 1994). As noted earlier, anxiety is an emotional response triggered by the fear that an event will produce negative consequences. Knowing how anxiety and other stresses affect us is the first step in developing skills to reduce them. According to Shibusawa and Norton (1989, as cited in Brislin & Yoshida, 1994), people have three options for coping with stress. They can change the situation causing the stress, change their attitude about the situation, or accommodate to the stress. In many cases it is not possible to change the situation. Children, especially, do not have the social power to change the many adult-imposed conditions in their lives. The second option involves changing how one thinks about the stressful situation. If one can look at a situation differently and not see it as stressful, he has solved the problem. This is very difficult to do when cultural mores are involved.

The third option, accommodating to stress, is usually the most realistic. Finding adaptive mechanisms that help them cope with stressful situations is extremely important for both adults and children. Adaptive mechanisms "are tools that help individuals cope with stress without distorting their perspectives" (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p. 75). Learning the skills needed for ICC will help people handle the stress involved and thereby minimize the frequency of stressful encounters, and success at ICC will increase their motivation to engage in such interactions.

Empathizing with another means being able to understand that person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors from his or her point of view (Gudykunst, 1993, 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1992; Samovar & Porter, 1995). Empathy is "the imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in another person's experience" (Bennett, 1979, p. 418). Teachers can develop empathy by practicing seeing students' behaviors from the students' points of view. One way teachers can do this is by using the Culture Bump activity (Archer, 1994; see Table 2), in which teachers can explore cultural differences by identifying similarities in motivation and behavior that they share with their CLD students and their families. Teachers learn that although they share the same motivations, the behavior and expectations for behavior that are reflective of these motivations vary by culture. Teachers add to their repertoire of culture-specific knowledge by processing their encounters with students from different cultural backgrounds. Seeking out objective information keeps negative stereotypes at bay and allows teachers to communicate successfully with their students and their families. Teachers who practice empathy are able to put aside their own experiences, beliefs, and feelings and enter into the world of their students; they are able to consider reactions and responses to situations from the other point of view.

Table 2
The Culture Bump

"When you have the impulse to react . . ."

1. ***Stop - do not act.***

2. ***Think - analyze the situation.*** **Describe teacher and student behaviors and the context in question.** *(What is happening?)*

   When a mainstream teacher asks his class a question, rather than raising his hand or answering spontaneously, a recently immigrated Asian student maintains silence with direct eye contact.

   Define the context for the culture bump (clash) and your expectations concerning acceptable behavior from students of your own culture.

   Context: The response a mainstream student makes when he knows the answer to a teacher's question.
   Expectations: A mainstream student might raise his hand, or nod his head, maintain direct eye contact, or even answer the question spontaneously.

   Determine the "human" quality that those behaviors represent for you such as consideration, cleverness, caring, kindness, or inconsideration, incompetence, indifference, or meanness.

   When a mainstream student behaves in this way, he is expressing that he knows the answer (attentiveness), his interest in the class or topic, or even his liking of the teacher.

   Search for the way that the other culture manifests the "human quality" previously identified in their culture. *(Why do they do what they do? and How do they do what we do?)*

   How do Asian teachers know when their students know the answer, are genuinely interested in the class, or like them?

3. ***Communicate in a culturally responsive manner.***

   The teacher can respond to the student in a way the student is accustomed and at the same time pull the student aside and teach mainstream classroom expectations, so eventually the student will become bicultural.

Adapted from: Archer, C. (1994). In G. Althen (Ed.), *Learning across cultures* (pp. 73-78). NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Adapting one's behavior to given situations involves selecting the best means of gathering information about others, being flexible with instructional strategies and materials, and trying to understand students' interactions and behaviors as the possible result of cultural differences before passing judgment (Brislin, 1993; Gudykunst, 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1992; Samovar & Porter, 1995). Teachers can adapt their behavior by including instructional strategies and materials that are suited to students from different backgrounds. They can also become mindful of their limitations in intercultural communication and try to recognize those times when they need to call for help. There are some ICC situations that will be extremely difficult to manage because of cultural differences in values. For example, parents of students receiving special education services may be asked to sign off on team recommendations. School officials assume that if parents sign, they agree with the recommendations. Members of some cultures, however, view signing as the socially acceptable response (i.e., "saving face") even if they are not likely to follow through on the recommendations. This behavior reflects cultural differences, not their unwillingness to meet their child's needs. If teachers find they are not able to bridge the cultural gap between school and home, they may need to bring in others (e.g., other teachers or community members from the student's cultural background) in order to accomplish their goals (Lynch & Hanson, 1992). People who have a better understanding of a particular culture can give needed information, refer teachers to other sources of information, and act as intermediaries.

Accurately making predictions about and explaining others' behaviors are two important skills that help individuals become competent at ICC (Gudykunst, 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1992). Teachers may explain a student's behavior by attributing certain characteristics to him as an individual. Thus a teacher may decide that a student's lack of participation in class is due to

his shyness, laziness, boredom, or lack of intelligence. Meaning may also be assigned to a student's behavior based on knowledge of, or assumptions made about, a group to which this individual belongs (Baron & Byrne, 1994). Attributions serve to simplify our cognitive processing, assist our comprehension, and help us to explain and predict others' behaviors. As Gudykunst (1994) reminds us:

> When we are on automatic pilot, our predictions and explanations for others' behavior are based on our stereotypes, attitudes, and previous experiences with the individuals involved. We may be highly confident of our predictions and explanations when we are on automatic pilot, but our predictions and explanations may not be accurate. If our predictions are based only on our stereotypes of another person's group, for example, our predictions will not be accurate if our stereotypes are inaccurate or the person is not typical of his or her group. Accurate predictions or explanations of strangers' behavior requires that we use cultural, social, and personal information. To make accurate predictions and explanations, we must be able to gather accurate information about others. (p. 191)

Teachers who have accurate knowledge about students and their cultural groups will not rely on inaccurate stereotypes in their efforts to predict or explain students' behaviors. Teachers can improve their ability to predict and explain by becoming more knowledgeable about group differences and personal similarities, by practicing mindfulness, and by learning how to manage their anxiety.

V. Conclusion

Intercultural communication is a complex process that depends on an understanding of cultural differences and the influence culture has on communication. As Delpit (1995) observes, "One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power" (p. 66). When teachers and students have different cultural backgrounds, their interactions can result in miscommunication. The cultural incongruence between teachers' and students' backgrounds is one reason culturally and linguistically diverse students do not perform as well as their white peers in U.S. schools (Zeichner, 1993). This is not a problem that is going to go away. "All U.S. demographic data points to a society that is becoming increasingly diverse, and that diversity is nowhere more evident than in our schools" (Delpit, 1995, p. 66).

Cultural clashes in the classroom occur because the norms and rules for interacting and communicating with others are embedded in our cultural backgrounds. As Gollnick and Chinn (1998) point out, culture "imposes order and meaning on our experiences (and) allows us to predict how others will behave in certain situations" (p. 4). When people from different cultural backgrounds attempt to communicate, their sense of order and reality may be very different. Cultural clashes may ensue since their expectations are different and they are not able to accurately predict each other's behavior. When teachers from one cultural background interact with students from other cultural backgrounds, communication can suffer unless the teachers are aware of what it takes to be competent at intercultural communication. Given the increasing diversity of our society, it is essential that schools address the issue of CLD-student underachievement by preparing teachers to become competent at ICC.

There is little in the educational literature that directly ties CLD-student underachievement to problems in intercultural communication in the classroom. We have, therefore, reviewed the literature on intercultural communication and applied key concepts to classroom scenarios. Explaining the range of behaviors that can be attributed to the socialization of CLD students would be essential in any professional development program on ICC. We believe that understanding the process of intercultural communication will help teachers to recognize the potential for cultural clashes and to either prevent them or resolve them if they should occur. Teachers must be given the conceptual tools necessary to discuss culture and communication. They need to understand, as well, how differences in cultural backgrounds influence their ability to accurately predict and explain the behavior of their CLD students. And teachers must be aware of the factors that affect their motivation and their students' motivation to engage in ICC in addition to the knowledge and skills necessary to become competent at intercultural communication.

We believe that teacher education and professional development should address these factors of intercultural communication in order to foster the development of:

- **Cultural self-awareness**. Because we are socialized as young children to understand acceptable ways of communicating within our cultural group, we are often unaware of alternative ways of communication that work just as well for people from other cultures. Until we become aware of the dimensions of our own culturally-bound behavior, we will not see the range of possibilities that exist in communication behavior.
- **Knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds**. Cultural self-awareness gives teachers the normative base they need in order to see the communication behaviors of their students as legitimate behaviors. Understanding these behaviors as being rooted in their students' culture,

rather than as being deviant, opens teachers to the possibility of learning about their students' cultural backgrounds. With this knowledge, teachers can then provide appropriate instruction to all of their students.

- **Knowledge of how cultures can be both similar and different**. In order to develop cultural self-awareness and understand the cultural backgrounds of others, one must understand the ways in which cultures can be both similar and different. Cultures may be similar with regard to one or more characteristics and different with regard to others. The four dimensions of cultural variability discussed in this paper illustrate but are not representative of the complex nature of culture. These dimensions provide a starting point that enables us to see the ways in which behaviors can be acquired through socialization.
- **Skills in developing culturally responsive classrooms**. Teachers must have opportunities to take the cultural knowledge they have learned about themselves and their students and apply it to classroom situations in order to create more culturally responsive classrooms. These expectations should address how to adapt the teaching of content; developing classroom activities, assignments, routines, and materials; providing directions; asking and answering questions; testing; teaching higher-order thinking skills; praising, rewarding, and disciplining; validating and building a student's self-esteem; providing constructive feedback; managing conflict; and using humor. In addition, teachers must be taught how to make their expectations explicit for CLD students and how to develop and provide opportunities for CLD students to learn and relate in ways that are unfamiliar to them.

In addition to addressing these three areas of knowledge, we believe that professional development should tap teachers' experiential frameworks, and that it should provide adequate time for teachers to explore and assimilate the information being presented.

- **Professional development must tap teachers' experiential frameworks**. Teachers will come to any professional development program with different understandings and abilities. Therefore, professional development must provide teachers with an opportunity to build on what they already know by tapping their experiential frameworks and knowledge bases and providing a foundation from which a meaningful discussion of the dimensions of cultural variability and other relevant concepts can be conducted.
- **Professional development requires reflection and interaction and therefore takes time**. Teachers will need time in order to explore their own cultural identities, how these impact classroom interaction, and to assimilate instruction in ICC. Quick and easy professional development is not likely to give teachers the time necessary to interact, to reflect on what they have learned in relation to their past experiences and knowledge, and to consider how they might apply that knowledge in future interactions with their students.

We believe that most teachers and students are simply not aware that many behavioral differences are based on cultural differences. A better understanding of these cultural differences and how they affect communication in the classroom will enable teachers to better meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

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Acknowledgements

A special acknowledgement goes to the participating teachers from Houston and Palm Elementary Schools who collaborated in the development of materials for the Organizing for Diversity Project (ODP). Dialogues and interactions with them guided our thinking in how intercultural communication is manifested in classroom settings.

We would like to thank Joan Buttram for the many hours she spent in reading numerous versions of this paper and providing editorial feedback. A special thanks also goes to Mary Standifer for her editorial services and to our colleagues, Leslie Blair, Patricia Castañeda-English, Marilyn Heath, Zena Rudo, Lacy Wood and for their peer review. Finally, thanks to Judy Waisath for her patience and assistance in repeatedly formatting this document and making the necessary revisions.

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